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Barnes Volunteers as Lawyer to Poor

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Defeated last month for re-election, Gov. Roy Barnes announced Tuesday that he will spend his first six months out of office as an unpaid attorney for the Atlanta Legal Aid Society, where he will represent poor people.

"One day I'll probably do some legal work that I will charge a handsome fee for - at least I hope there are those that are still willing to pay," he told reporters.

"But for now, I think it is important to fulfill my duty as a lawyer to help those who need it the most, to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves and to defend those whose life and livelihoods depend on it," he said.

Previous governors have gone to prestigious law firms, joined corporate boards or returned to thriving businesses.

"I don't think I've ever heard of anybody doing this before," Emory University political science professor Merle Black said.

"If he's actually going to represent individuals for that organization, they're going to get great representation. You're going to get some powerful legal muscle there," Mr. Black said.

Mr. Barnes said he already has his first case, but he wouldn't say what it is.

Atlanta Legal Aid provides civil services to poor people in five metro Atlanta counties.

Mr. Barnes said he was hoping to send a message to other lawyers.

"This privilege to practice law is just that - it's a privilege. And it comes with a cost and it comes with a bill . . . We as lawyers have a responsibility to make sure that everyone, regardless of whether they can afford it or not, has quality representation. And if we don't do that, then we're not much of a profession," he said.

Steven Gottlieb, the society's executive director, said, "I can't imagine anything that could be better than to have the governor of the state, in his first act as a private citizen, donate six months of his time to represent poor people . . . That's just astounding to me."

Mr. Barnes did not necessarily need to seek a top-salaried job after leaving office. Financial disclosure reports and tax returns he released in June showed Mr. Barnes had a net worth of \$12.3 million.